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ABSTRACT

The 1976-79 schedules of the three major television networks were analyzed to determine what strategies were used to organize prime time schedules and what types of programs appeared during prime time viewing periods. Five essential programing strategies were identified: fraction of selection (cost versus reward), lowest common denominator (wide audience appeal), least objectionable program (compared to other programs on at the same time), program continuity (the nightly "flow" of a network's programing), and counterprograming (providing different program content from the other networks). The homogeneity of prime time content was demonstrated both quantitatively and qualitatively for all three years. The same four program types (comedy, crime drama, drama, and movie) accounted for more than 75% of the prime time menu for all three years. The data clearly indicated an absence of choice for the television audience. Whereas imitation is profitable for the network, the outcome for the viewer is redundant banality. The bulk of television content, then, is popular in the sense of mass viewership; yet there are few really viable alternatives within the structure of that content. The technological innovations and other programing systems that are now developing may provide television viewers a wider selection of program material. (RL)

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COMMERCIAL NETWORK TELEVISION: STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAMMING AND THE CONTENT OF PRIME TIME TV, 1976-1979

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COMMERICAL NETWORK TELEVISION: STRATEGIES FOR PROGRAMMING AND THE CONTENT OF PRIME TIME TV, 1976-1979

That Americans watch a lot of television probably comes as a surprise to no one. Emitting from 988 stations, messages are beamed in excess of 18 hours per day to the more than 74 million households (98% of all homes) owning at least one receiver.[1] In fact, "more families have television sets than have bathtubs, telephones, toasters, vacuum cleaners, or a regular daily newspaper."[2] Moreover, the diffusion of electronic hardware is more than equaled in terms of consumer use. The most recent data (1978) indicates that, for U.S. households, the television set is "on" an average of six hours and eleven minutes daily.[3]

PURPOSE AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The research question this paper addresses is <u>not</u> what is being watched but, rather, what is being offered. More specifically, this study examines and discusses two aspects of commercial network television programming during prime time: (1) the practical application of programming strategies and (2) the program-type content of prime time TV.

The rationale for investigating the research questions presented above include the following elements. First, while TV audience program preferences are reasonably well documented[4] the foundation for these preferences lies in what the audience is offered. Thus, an understanding of the quantitative frequency and the qualitative content of what programs are available (the menu) is a prerequisite to a more complete comprehension and conceptualization of what the audience prefers (the diet). This report, therefore, continues and updates the work of, among others, Head,[5] Dominick and Pearce,[6] and Austin.[7]

Second, prime time (8:00 to 11:00 p.m.) was chosen as the subject for analysis since the lion's share of televiewing for most Americans occurs during this time period. The

1978 Nielsen Television Index reports that some 64.1% of all television homes are using their sets during these hours on any given night of the week.[8] Schramm notes that "on any weekday evening, 75 million Americans are likely to be watching television."[9]

Third, the three major commercial networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, directly, or indirectly through affiliates,[10] govern fully 95% of the nation's commercial stations,[11] and hence the prime time content and thus the audience's diet. Testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust and Monopoly in 1968, Federal Communications Commissioner Robert T. Bartley stated that, based on program ratings, these three organizations account for wholly 94% of the audience in the top fifty markets.[12]

Clearly, prime time is important to the networks. The program lineups assembled for this time period have been contrived and designed to attract maximum viewership. Although fewer commercial minutes per hour are allowed in prime time (if the stations broadcasting the network feed follow the National Association of Broadcasters' [NAB] guidelines[13]), the actual dollars per second are much more valuable during these hours than at other times due to the large number of viewers. And, as several observers have noted, television is in the business of delivering audiences to advertisers.[14] "Quality," states "Super Station" owner Ted Turner of Atlanta's WTCG, "is how much money we made off it."[15] Similar remarks resound within the industry itself: in 1975 NBC business vice president Don Carswell affirmed that "we're not selling the program; we're selling the audience for the program" (emphasis in original) and, at the same time, executive producer of Columbia Television's Police Story, Stan Kallis, emphatically pronounced, "We're here to deliver the audience to the next commercial."[16] Thus, for the network programmer, careful, critical attention must be given to the strategic progression of shows during this three hour time span. Successful television programming involves far more than merely arriving at some capricious sequence of program product. Of course, networks want to gather large, inert audiences for their prime time line-ups. There is also a desire to constantly increase one's own audience size. In order to accomplish the latter, clearly the competition must suffer. Hence the programmer is faced with two problems:

(1) scheduling shows where they will have the best opportunity to succeed against the opposition and (2) drawing audiences away from the other networks thereby increasing one's own share and, consequently, hiking up commercial spot prices. It is to the network's, and by extension the local broadcaster's, corporate benefit to schedule with the hope that a sort of viewer inertia will occur.

Annually, from mid-January through the end of February, the network decision-makers huddle. During these six weeks the programming czars come to a series of verdicts regarding which shows for the coming fall season are expendable, which ought to be continued (intact, modified, or rescheduled), and which of the commissioned pilots best strategically fit the schedule for competitive purposes. While the determination of programs and scheduling rests solely with the networks, for shows both currently airing and those to be broadcast, there is primarily only one means of ascertaining audience-draw: ratings and shares[17] are the criteria of what show is broadcast when (day and time slot), duration of a particular program (one season or a couple of weeks), and, most importantly to the networks, the cost per thousand to the advertiser which, in turn, establishes a spot's selling price.

METHODOLOGY

Brown has asserted that, once tuned in, "any viewer will switch channels over the course of an evening, but nearly all prefer not to if one network provides the night-long anesthetic."[18] In order for network programmers to attain maximum audience inertia, they must schedule the evening's line-up in accordance with five crucial and inter-related variables: (1) the audience's selection of television instead of any other activity, (2) lowest common denominator, (3) least objectionable program, (4) lead-in and lead-out programs, or program continuity, and (5) counter-programming. To illustrate the discussion of these programming strategies the fall prime time schedules of ABC, CBS, and NBC for three years (1976-77, 77-78, 78-79) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 About Here

TV Guide provides the source for the schedules.[19] The actual programs offered during prime time have been recoded according to their program-type. The "type" of program was coded according to TV Guide's content sidebar (e.g., Happy Days - Comedy). Patrick Murphy, TV Guide's Programming Editor, has explained that these program descriptors are arrived at by the magazine editors' "judgment and common industry acceptance of these terms."[20] The author performed the coding procedure; intracoder reliability was 100% (with a one week separation between codings).

PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES

Audience Selection

This is one variable over which programmers have little direct control. Potential televiewers have at their discretion multiple diversions from which to choose. In the search for leisure time activities television is but one possibility. Using an economic analogy, Rivers and Schramm present what they call a "fraction of selection":[21]

$$\frac{\text{expectation of reward}}{\text{effort thought to be required}} = \text{likelihood of selection}$$

These authors posit that individuals (consciously or unconsciously) use this fraction to determine their choice from the myriad options available. Individuals seek that activity which, relative to other available activities, rewards the most while costing (in the broadest sense) the least. Giving it an edge over other media (but not necessarily other activities), television has several inherent advantages: typically, to use TV, the farthest one has to go is to one's living room or bedroom (as opposed to going out to the movies); it requires, at best, low level literacy (as juxtaposed with print media); TV provides instantaneous gratification for such needs as escape, fantasy, and relaxation; television is monetarily inexpensive (most people, in fact, inaccurately consider it free,

except for the initial cost of the receiver and, perhaps, the electric bill while not considering that by viewing or not they are, in effect, subsidizing advertisers); and television can satisfy a need such as news-seeking (albeit cursorily) quickly and with little effort. In short, television, perhaps more than any other mass medium, tends to be most rewarding and least costly.

Lowest Common Denominator (LCD)

Because of the large, heterogeneous nature of its audience, telecasters must, if they are to attract maximum viewers, broadcast shows with the widest possible appeal. That is, their program(s) must be attractive to the younger portion of the audience (for they will, as studies have shown,[22] request their parents to buy items presented in commercials and, perhaps more importantly, often control the channel selection for the whole family[23]) while simultaneously not alienating the older, more mature, viewers. Further, the intellectual level of any given show must not be so high as to drive away the less educated and, concurrently, cannot be so low as to be insulting to the better educated. Moreover, the nation's varied geographic regions have to be taken into consideration, as must minority groups of all types: ethnic, racial, sexual. (Examples of the problems encountered by these variables include WLBT's [Jackson, Mississippi] refusal to carry network programs focusing on blacks and, elsewhere, pressure by homosexual groups on ABC affiliates concerning an episode of Marcus Welby caused some not to broadcast that show.)

The dilemma faced by the programmer is one of finding a comfortable middle ground -- or at least one that will not significantly upset many viewers. Accordingly, "In the face of the profit motive, individual programmers are shackled and prevented from introducing new forms and new ideas."[24] Further, because of the medium's voracious appetite for program content, the prodigious rate at which it consumes material as required by the amount of airtime to be filled, television seems predestined for only mediocre, second-rate substance. Sydney Head, in his authoritative history of American broadcasting,

provides an easy-to-grasp handle concerning the nearly insatiable demands TV makes upon program producers:

> The voracity of the medium . . . has no parallel in previous history. The whole of Hollywood's annual output, combined with the entire Broadway drama season and with the Metropolitan Opera season thrown in, would not fill more than a small fraction of television's annual schedule.[25]

Although an occasionally enlightening program does appear (more often than not during a "dark" or "black" week -- four weeks in the year during which Nielsen suspends its rating service and adjusts its survey apparatus), Gresham's Law -- that the bad drives out the good -- appears as the most incessantly prevading ambience. Barnouw provides an illustration of the networks' appraisal of both audience and program content:

> A disdain for the "high road" trickled down through the network hierarchies. When an [James] Aubrey [then president of CBS-TV] lieutenant engaged producer-writer William Froug, who had been producing Twilight Zone, for the Hollywood position of executive producer in charge of drama, it was emphasized that Froug was not to produce Medea but mass entertainment. The executive summarized: "Your job is to produce shit."[26]

Least Objectionable Program (LOP)

As developed and described by its author, former NBC programming chief Paul Klein, LOP "contends that programming does not have to be good, . . . it merely has to be less objectionable to most people than anything else on TV at that moment."[27] This concept, stressing that a program need not be good in essence, is an especially useful tool in conjunction with counterprogramming (to be discussed below). According to Klein, individuals do not so much watch particular programs as they do the medium. Obviously McLuhanesque in origin, Klein asserts that, for a variety of reasons, we watch television primarily and the content is almost incidental. To its author, LOP, with but few exceptions, has the reliability of natural law.

Least Objectionable Programming explains why many interesting shows (to some) are canceled while other, insipid (to some) programs seem to linger on and run endlessly.

By scheduling a weak show against (in the same time slot) even weaker competition the former inevitably looks better and, hence, more attractive to viewers. Juxtapose a strong program with a still stronger show and the latter will surely remain the winner. The losing program will either be ousted from the schedule completely or moved to another time period with the hope that LOP will run its course -- this time favorable to the show. Using LOP and counterprogramming strategies, individual stations in some markets are moving their local news shows to 5:30 p.m. While their competitors continue to present their news in the traditional 6:00 p.m. slot, the renegade broadcaster is offering syndicated reruns. Thus, for the person doing network scheduling, placing the least objectionable programs at the onset of prime time, when viewers are making their evening's channel selection, helps ensure a large audience (that may possibly continue for the rest of the night).

Program Continuity

Generally, networks function according to a philosophy of program continuity or flow. From the moment a local affiliate "plugs into" the network until "disconnection," networks try to develop audience flow from one show to the next. Program -- or audience -- flow means, essentially, that the audience from one show will remain tuned to the same network for the next offering. Believing that viewers will continue to watch the channel originally selected unless they positively abhor the sequent program (LOP), the lead-in show must be most compelling. Hence flow strategy is most effective when the network's evening debut is a clear hit since successes are more likely to attract large audiences than are less winning or new programs.

This sequence of product could take one of two forms. One approach is to design an entire evening's schedule of complementary, genre-related programs. Examples of this would include CBS's 1976-77 and 77-78 Saturday night line-up (see Table 1) in which the viewer, hopefully, flows from comedy to comedy and finally to a variety show (see also ABC's Thursday schedule for 77-78 and 78-79). The second strategy involves beginning with less involving program content, such as comedy, and building up throughout the

night to "higher" levels. The ploy here is to initially attract the whole family and, as the children drop out to (presumably) go to bed, keep hold of the adults. CBS's Thursday programming (all three years) illustrates this technique; prime time begins with drama and escalates to crime drama programs (see also ABC, Tuesday 76-78 and Thursday 78-79; CBS, Sunday 78-79, Monday 76-79, Tuesday 76-78, Friday 77-79; NBC, Sunday 78-79, Tuesday 78-79, Wednesday 77-78).

Also known as block booking, a prosperous, flourishing "network evening has cohesiveness as a system of companionable shows whose audiences tend to blend into one another."[28] Any weak links in the line-up can potentially cause audiences to change channels. Therefore, the importance of continuity is such that an unattractive program might lose not only audiences for that particular time period but also for the entire evening.

The attrition rate for new (and hence unproven in terms of audience-draw) shows during an average year can be as high as 60%.[29] Meticulous programming can prune this percentage considerably by positioning weaker (new or existing) shows between stronger ones. A show is said to be "hammocked" when it is preceded by a strong lead-in and followed by an equally potent lead-out program.

> The matter of viewer carry-over from one program to the next becomes one of crucial importance in planning a day's programming; introducing a controversial program which might offend segments of the population risks a diminished audience for the next scheduled program. For the network broadcaster, who caters to a large-scale audience, the financial reward for shunning such risks is considerable.[30]

The power of good lead-in/out programming cannot be underestimated. With regard to public broadcasting, Brown claims that their unwillingness to "block out programs for audience flow is one reason for their being a minor factor in the national television habit."[31] Quite clearly the motive behind audience flow is that not only will the viewer remain inert as the programs change, but will also sit still for the commercials.[32]

A final example of lead-in programming involves the presentation of feature-length

movies. Until recently, televised motion pictures were run with commercial interruptions approximately every 15 minutes -- like any other program. In the past few years, however, programmers on all three networks have changed their strategy. Currently, nearly all motion pictures run an initial 25 to 30 minutes without advertising or promotional intrusion. In this case the audience is led-in to the movie by a powerful program; the actual thematic content of this program is probably less consequential than in other instances of lead-in as film content is variable from week-to-week. Viewer inertia is achieved by creating dissonance. If, as in most cases (see Table 1), the film begins at 9:00 p.m., the other networks are programming one-hour shows. Hence, the lengthy, unbroken film intro is used as a hook: if the viewer has watched, out of curiosity, let's say, the first 30 minutes of the film s/he will have missed half of any other program offered (in most cases). The viewer feels less dissonance by staying tuned to the movie than by switching stations to a program already in progress.

Counterprogramming

Counterprogramming is a tactic generally used by second and third ranked networks. ABC is credited with developing this technique beginning about the time of the 1960 season.[33] "Counterprogramming means designing a schedule to offer programs that are different from (counter to) the programs available in the same time periods on the other networks."[34] Clearly, counterprogramming works hand-in-hand with LOP: what is different from what the other networks are offering may also be less objectionable. Obviously, the ratings leader has no need to counterprogram except in instances where there is a weak spot in its schedule. For twenty continuous years CBS dominated prime time, followed by NBC and, at a far distance, ABC. In the past three seasons, ABC has not only usurped but actually exchanged places with CBS. This may be primarily attributable to their effective use of counterprogramming.

Quite often a weak show can be turned into a hit by careful counterprogramming against the other two networks. The strategy is especially effective when one network

uses another's programming as a lead-in to their own shows. Notice, for instance, the 76-78 Saturday programming of ABC and CBS. Both networks begin with one hour of comedy. At 9:00, however, ABC scheduled a crime drama while CBS continued programming comedy. Other occasions of this specific use of counterprogramming may be found by examining Table 1. Examples of counterprogramming in the more narrow and traditional sense may be seen by third-ranked NBC's 8-9:00 p.m. Saturday schedule (all three years) as well as elsewhere throughout Table 1. Perhaps the best example of successful counterprogramming is CBS's 60 Minutes. The news magazine competes with two shows aimed at the kiddie audience, World of Disney (NBC) and The Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew (ABC). For the adult viewer there is virtually no choice.

As Sandman et al. point out, there is one important qualifier regarding counter-programming: it

> is never allowed to interfere with the "least objectionable program" principle. Stealing viewers is nice, but keeping your own is essential. Thus, every program must have mass appeal.[35]

Finally, Shanks, himself a network (ABC) producer, states:

> Frequently program flow and counterprogramming turn out to be as scientifically precise as a tout on a race horse from your mailman. Nevertheless, these notions of programming are viewed as golden tablets of faith by the industry and are, in fact, more valid than not.[36]

PROGRAM CONTENT

The strategic aspects of prime time programming for viewer inertia, as discussed above, lead quite naturally into the second aspect of this study: the program-type content of prime time. In terms of actual TV content, maximum strategic effectiveness axiomatically implies homogeneity. This is especially true when considered from the LOP point of view. One of Wunderkind Fred Silverman's programming maxims is that "Familiarity breeds acceptability."[37] Two recent studies of prime time television, using the same methodology as was employed here, document the fact that four program-types (Movies,

Crime Drama, Comedy, and Drama) account for more than two-thirds of the prime time menu.[38] Moreover, these studies indicated no significant overall differences between the three networks' program-type offerings thereby supporting the above assertion of homogeneity.

Some observers have maintained that "The most enduring axiom of television showmanship is that anything worth doing is worth doing twice . . ."[39] In 1977, however, Herbert S. Scholosser, then president of NBC, told affiliates that the current programming strategy of all three networks was moving away from reliance on the weekly series with continuing elements and toward special event-type shows.[40] However, one year later a TV Guide poll of affiliates indicated that they preferred "good, solid, wall-to-wall series programming over any number of splashy, emphemeral, highly touted specials."[41] A recent survey discovered several perplexing and paradoxical feelings held by the public toward television programming and the issue of homogeneity. Eighty-one percent of those individuals surveyed felt that the range of program choices presently available was "fair" (40%), "good" or "excellent" (41%). However, only 6% said that the variety of programs was what satisfies them the most about current TV programming while 10% indicated that a source of dissatisfaction with current programming was the lack of variety.[42]

Is, however, this criticism of program homogeneity a reality or misperception? Even the most cursory examination of Table 1 reveals the similarity both within and between networks. Each network has one evening in which the program-types and line-up are identical for all three years surveyed (Monday for NBC, Thursday for CBS, and Friday for NBC). Moreover, each network also has at least one evening in which the program-types and exact line-up is virtually (only one hour of different programming) unchanged for all three years (Sunday and Wednesday for ABC, Monday for CBS, and Friday for NBC). Thus, fully one-third of all prime time programming by program-type and program line-up has remained either intact or virtually intact for the three years considered here.

By way of contrast, however, some selected instances of scheduling change can be observed in Table 1. Over the three years examined here, ABC's 10 to 11:00 slot has been

highly volatile, with yearly program-type changes on Saturday and Thursday (see also ABC's 8 to 9:00 slot on Monday); CBS's Tuesday and Friday prime time line-ups have altered greatly; NBC has probably had the greatest amount of rescheduling which may be due to its third place position (see Sunday and Wednesday 8-9:00, Tuesday 9-10:00, Wednesday 10-11:00, and all night Thursday). While program shuffling does occur, only rarely are new program-types introduced.

For each network the amount of time (and corresponding percentages) devoted to each program-type by year is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 About Here

In order to ascertain if there are statistically significant differences between the three networks' program-type offerings, Friedman two-way analysis of variance tests were performed for each year. The results of these rank-ordering tests indicate that there are no significant differences between the networks for any of the three years considered here. (For 76-77: $X^2 = .014$, df = 2, $p > .05$; for 77-78: $X^2 = .333$, df = 2, $p > .05$; for 78-79: $X^2 = .18$, df = 2, $p > .05$.)

Table 2 also allows us to examine three year programming trends by network. (Only the four major program-types -- Comedy, Crime Drama, Drama, and Movie -- will be discussed here.) ABC has increased the number of Comedy hours each year while both CBS and NBC peaked in the 77-78 season and then reduced the number of hours devoted to this category. Both NBC and CBS have each year decreased the number of Crime Drama hours whereas ABC halted their decrease in 77-78. Drama hours on CBS and NBC have steadily increased while ABC has held constant during the three years examined here. Finally, ABC has offered the same number of hours devoted to Movies, CBS has increased this category only in the third year, and NBC presents an erratic pattern.

Table 3 presents the summed number of hours (and corresponding percentages) by year

for each program-type.

Table 3 About Here

Perhaps the most significant observation that may be gleaned from Table 3 is the percentage of prime time hours devoted to the four dominant program-types: Comedy, Crime Drama, Drama, and Movie. For all three years these four program-types were responsible for more than three-quarters of the prime time menu (77.7%, 76.2%, and 76.9% respectively). A closer examination of Table 3 reveals some rearranging of the exact dominance of each of the four program-types from year to year. Comedy moved from second most frequently appearing during 76-77 to first in the following two years.[43] Crime Drama programs have drastically dropped from most to least frequently appearing during the three years surveyed; the diminishing number of hours for this program-type may be a result of increased pressure by various groups (e.g., PTA, AMA, NCCB, ACT) on the networks to cut down on programs high in violence. Movie and Drama programming have both made modest hourly gains over the three years. Conversely, Variety, Western, and Adventure have all decreased in frequency. Finally, the networks appear to be taking tentative steps to introduce (or re-introduce) a few different program-types: Comedy Drama, Mystery, Profile, and Science Fiction. However, three of the four program-type shows are now canceled (Mystery, Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew; Profile, Lifeline; and Science Fiction, Logan's Run and Battlestar Galactica).

Networks seek out shows which will be immediately accepted by mass audiences, eschewing the new, controversial, or experimental programs for which audiences have to be built (a high-risk proposition). The status quo holds far greater certainty for both viewer and network than innovative gambles. The intense competition for Nielsen points results in a programming mentality that fosters little originality. From this point of view, immitation is the surest, safest methodology for program development including: spin-offs

created from previous or current successes, appropriating formulas from British television, and convoluted adaptations and extensions of motion picture themes or situations.

From the above, one clear effect on the audience is absence of choice. Whereas immitation is profitable for the network, the outcome for the viewer is redundant banality. Further, networks, and by affiliation broadcasters, have lock-stepped themselves into an arena of severely restricted options. Creativity and vitality have gone by the wayside in favor of fixation on the Dow Jones Index. The bulk of television content, then, is popular (in the sense of mass viewership) yet there are, at present, few viable alternatives. The strict genre patterns, reminiscent of 1930 and 40's Hollywood, are self-reflexively reinforcing culminating in little deviation and much in-breeding: electronic hemophilia. Currently, the ideal of an open marketplace, is in reality, more a specialty shop and less a department store.

Hope for the televiewer, however, may be on the horizon. The advent and diffusion of innvoations such as videodiscs and home entertainment centers offer the viewer the possibility of self-selection of program material and, potentially, greater selection from which to choose. The increasing expansion of cable television services (with such "extras" as Home Box Office) and cable's technological improvements (such as the interactive Qube system presently being tested by Warner Communications in Columbus, Ohio) are fast becomeing rivals to the traditional network stranglehold. Moreover, the recent occurrence of "Super Stations," utilizing satellites and cable systems, presents an additional threat to the network programers while simultaneously (potentially) increasing program diversity. And, with the rapid development of new techniques, direct satellite broadcasting may soon become a reality. Finally, the networks' affiliates themselves appear to be restless. Since 1976 Operation Prime Time (OPT) has been, to the dismay of the networks, gathering larger and larger audiences. Producing and distributing such programs as Testimony of Two Men, stations carrying OPT fare have found favorable audiences and increased revenues. The importance of OPT is that the only way affiliates

can run these "fourth network" programs is by dropping their network commitments during the time slot thereby clearing time for OPT. One writer has suggested that OPT "could do to the networks what independent producers did for the old Hollywood studios."[44] All of these recent developments need researching as the television state-of-the-art moves on.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study reported here examined programming strategies for and the program-type content of prime time television as delivered by the three commercial networks for a three year period. Five essential programming strategies were identified and discussed: fraction of selection, lowest common denominator, least objectionable program, program continuity, and counterprogramming. The homogeneity of prime time content by program-type was demonstrated both quantitatively and qualitatively for all three years. The same four program-types were found to dominate more than three-fourths of the prime time menu for all three years.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Broadcasting Yearbook 1979, p. A-2.

[2]Gerald S. Lesser, Children and Television: Lessons from Sesame Street (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p. 18.

[3]Broadcasting Yearbook 1979, p. A-2.

[4]For a concise review of the literature on program preferences see George Comstock et al., Television and Human Behavior (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

[5]Sydney W. Head, "Content Analysis of Television Drama Programs," Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television 9: 175-194.

[6]Joseph R. Dominick and Millard C. Pearce, "Trends in Network Prime Time Programming, 1953-74," Journal of Communication 26 (Winter 1976).

[7]Bruce A. Austin, "Public Interest Programming by Commercial Network Affiliates," Journalism Quarterly 56 (Spring 1979): 87-91, 147; Bruce A. Austin, "Prime Time Television in a Medium-Sized Market: A Content Analysis," Communication Quarterly, in press. These studies examined prime time program-types as broadcast on network affiliates in one market during two seasons (January-June 1977 and September 1977-June 1978 respectively). Affiliate pre-emption of the network feed was also measured and the findings indicated that only very rarely did affiliates pre-empt; hence the affiliates' broadcasts were highly -- but not completely -- reflective of their networks' offerings.

[8]Cited in Broadcasting Yearbook 1979, p. C-341.

[9]Wilbur Schramm, Men, Messages, and Media (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 173.

[10]Betsy Carter ("ABC Goes A-Hunting," Newsweek, 8 January 1979, p. 70) reports that NBC has 216 affiliated stations, CBS has 202, and ABC has 200.

[11]Frederick C. Whitney, Mass Media and Mass Communications in Society (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1975), p. 253. Recently Joel Chaseman, president of Post-Newsweek stations, has called for decreased reliance on networks and increased program development by local and group broadcasters (see "Chaseman Calls for a New Order in Television and Programming," Broadcasting, 19 March 1979, p. 44).

[12]Cited in The Network Project, "Control of Information," Notebook Number 3, March 1973, p. 15.

[13]The 17th edition of the NAB Television Code (pp. 14-15) stipulates the following:

> In prime time on network affiliated stations, non-program material shall not exceed nine minutes thirty seconds in any 60-minute period. . . In all other time [sic], non-program material shall not exceed 16 minutes in any 60-minutes period.

The NAB is the self-regulatory organization for broadcasters. Stations join voluntarily and the strictest penalty for not following the Code is the loss of the privilege to display the NAB seal. For more information on this and related aspects see Joel Persky,

"Self Regulation of Broadcasting -- Does It Exist?," Journal of Communication 27 (Spring 1977): 202-210.

[14]See, for instance: Les Brown, Television: The Business Behind the Box (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 15-16 and Gaye Tuchman, "Introduction," in The TV Establishment: Programming for Power and Profit, Gaye Tuchman ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 5. Further, not only is the absolute number of viewers delivered important, but also the type of audience member. For instance, even though it consistently drew large audiences, CBS canceled The Red Skelton Show because its audience was not primarily within the 18 to 34 year old bracket where disposable income is at its peak. For a discussion of the viscissitudes involving Skelton see Brown, Television, pp. 47-58 and Robert Metz, CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye (New York: New American Library, 1975), pp. 315-345.

[15]Quoted in Neil Hickey, "It's Being Called A 'Dance of Death,'" TV Guide, 29 April 1978, p. 40.

[16]Jeff Greenfield, "The Fight for $60,000 a Half Minute," New York Times Magazine, 7 September 1975, p. 62.

[17]A program rating measures the percentage of the total possible audience (TV-equipped homes) tuned to a particular program as differentiated from the program share which is the percentage of the actual television audience (sets in use) watching a given show (popularity relative to direct competition). For any show to be deemed successful, the general rule of thumb is that, minimally, it must garner at least a national rating of 17 or a 30 share. Obviously, the larger the audience, the higher the income which, axiomatically, tends to perpetuate and reinforce the validity of the programming strategies and the type of programs offered.

[18]Brown, Television, p. 116. ABC's Seymour Amlen posits that programming a TV network "is not a science, but is something of an art" (quoted in Hickey, "It's Being Called a 'Dance of Death,'" p. 38). From the discussion that follows the reader will perhaps conclude that a synthesis of the two -- art and science -- is a more appropriate and accurate description.

[19]"Nighttime," TV Guide, 18 September 1976, p. 7; "Nighttime," TV Guide, 10 September 1977, p. A-1; "Nighttime," TV Guide, 9 September 1978, p. A-1.

[20]Telephone interview with Patrick Murphy, Philadelphia, PA, 9 October 1978. Some critics argue that these "genres" are too broad to provide a precise measurement of meaning (see, for instance, Horace Newcomb, TV: The Most Popular Art [New York: Anchor Books, 1974] and Horace Newcomb (ed.), Television: The Critical View, 2nd ed., [New York: Oxford University Press, 1969]).

The Nielsen Company, for example, sorts TV shows into one of 22 program-type categories. While the purists are probably aesthetically justified in their dissection, for purposes of this study grouping situation and domestic comedies together, for example, by no means violates the thematic foundation of the program. Further, the thematic content of motion pictures obviously varies from film to film. As a program-type, however, Movies are differentiated from other successional shows, or series, by precisely this lack of thematic continuity; i.e., characterization and development is self-contained within the film as opposed to weekly episodes.

[21]William Rivers and Wilbur Schramm, "The Impact of Mass Media," in Mass Media and Mass Man, 2nd ed., Alan Casty ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), p. 7.

[22]See for example, the section of "How TV Sells Children" in the Journal of Communication 27 (Winter 1977): 100-157.

[23]Children's media use influencing their parents' is known as "reverse modeling." See for instance, Peter Clarke, "An Experiment to Increase the Audience for Educational Television," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1963 and A. Bottorff, "Television, Respect, and the Older Adolescent," Master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1970.

[24]Tuchman, "Introduction," in The TV Establishment, p. 5. John Tebbel ("The Prospect Before Us," in Radio and Television, Allen Kirschner and Linda Kirschner eds. [New York: Odyssey Press, 1971], p. 62) discusses the relationship between audience size and a medium's content as follows:

> . . . television is a mass medium in the truest sense of that abused phrase and what television's critics sometimes forget is that the history of mass culture shows us that that more the base of a medium is broadened, the lower its cultural level will be. Television has the broadest base of any medium, and by and large, it rests at the lowest cultural level. [emphasis in original]

Eric Sevareid, former CBS news commentator, remarks that (in "Remarks Before the Washington Journalism Center [June 3, 1976]," in The Popular Arts in America, 2nd ed., William Hammel ed. [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977], p. 262) "The cultural level of a mass medium represents the cultural level of the people" (emphasis in original). From this point of view one might wish to consider the purpose, or function, of television: should it reflect or project?, mirror or lead?, a society's cultural tastes, desires, and potentials.

[25]Sydney W. Head, Broadcasting in America: A Survey of Television and Radio, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), p. 176. Aubrey Singer ("Television: Window on Culture or Reflection in the Glass," in Radio and Television, Kirschner and Kirschner eds., p. 55), British broadcasting executive, believes that the result is that TV managers are forced to "play down to lesser cultural levels, supporting complacency rather than satisfying aspiration." This is, of course, just what programmers do, as LCD indicates.

[26]Erik Barnouw, Tube of Plenty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 347.

[27]Cited in Whitney, Mass Media, p. 249. Klein's essay originally appeared as "The Men Who Run TV Aren't That Stupid . . . They Know Us Better Than You Think," New York, 25 January 1971, pp. 20-29.

[28]Brown, Television, pp. 115-116.

[29]James Monaco, "The Prime Time Game, " American Film 2 (October 1976): 23.

[30]The Network Project, "Control of Information," p. 14.

[31]Brown, Television, p. 116.

[32]Interestingly, an early experimenter hoping for viewer inertia during commercials

was the Warner Brothers film studio. Warners made an unprecedented move by agreeing to produce films for ABC-TV for the 1955-56 season. At the time, the WB decision was anathematic to the major film producers as television was severely eroding the motion picture audience.

> The detail that clinched the deal for Jack Warner was that Warner could include in each one hour film a 10-minute segment to be called Behind the Cameras, which would show Warner movie stars and crews at work on feature films soon to be in the theaters. Behind the Cameras would be a glorified 10-minute commercial for Warner features. It was felt that this would ease theater exhibitors' anger over Warner dealing with the enemy.

Unfortunately for Warners, Behind the Cameras was short-lived. From surveys, ABC found that audiences would not remain transfixed as expected. BTC was shortened and later completely eliminated for fear that it might upset program flow altogether. (Cited in Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, p. 193.)

[33]Barnouw, Tube of Plenty, p. 263. An old industry chestnut concerning (at the time) ABC's traditional third place and mercurial programming went as follows: "Wanna end the Vietnam war? Put it on ABC and it will be canceled in 13 weeks."

[34]Bob Shanks, The Cool Fire (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p. 101.

[35]Peter M. Sandman, David M. Rubin, and David B. Sachsman, Media: An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Media, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p. 257.

[36]Shanks, The Cool Fire, p. 101.

[37]Dick Hobson, "ABC's Quarter Million Dollar Man Performs Heroics Too," TV Guide, 7 May 1977, p. 6.

[38]Austin, "Public Interest Programming by Commercial Network Affiliates" and Austin, "Prime Time Television in a Medium-Sized Market: A Content Analysis " A third study, employing the same methodology as the above two, focused on what Nicholas Johnson calls "People's time" -- 4-8:00 p.m. (Bruce A. Austin, "People's Time in a Medium-Sized Market: A Content Analysis," Journalism Quarterly, in press); this study, too, found no significant differences between affiliates by program-type.

[39]Harry F. Waters with Martin Kasindorf, "Send in the Clones," Newsweek, 29 January 1979, p. 85.

[40]Lee Margulies, "NBC Affiliates Get Assurance," Los Angeles Times, 19 May 1977, Part IV, p. 18. This strategy is known as blueprint programming or event scheduling. Conceptually, the idea is to present a varied menu of specials, novels for television, dramas, and miniseries.

[41]Neil Hickey, "Changing the Shape of Television," TV Guide, 22 April 1978, p. 10.

[42]Myles Callum, "What Viewers Love/Hate About Television," TV Guide, 12 May 1979, pp. 6-12.

[43]Twenty-three percent of the participants in the 1979 survey (Callum, "What Viewers Love/Hate About Television") indicated they wanted more situation comedies.

[44]Gerry Nadel, "Who Owns Prime Time? The Threat of the 'Occasional' Networks," New York, 30 May 1977, p. 33.

Table 1

Prime Time Program-Types: 1976-1979

	ABC			CBS			NBC		
				SATURDAY					
	76-77	77-78	78-79	76-77	77-78	78-79	76-77	77-78	78-79
8	C	C	C	C	C	C	A	A	CD
8:30	C	C	C	C	C	C	A	A	CD
9	CD	CD	C	C	C	CD	M	M	M
9:30	CD	CD	C	C	C	CD	M	M	M
10	CD	C	D	V	V	D	M	M	A
10:30	CD	C	D	V	V	D	M	M	A
				SUNDAY					
8	A	A	SF	V	C	V	CD	*	D
8:30	A	A	SF	V	C	V	CD	*	D
9	M	M	M	CD	C	C	CD	D	D
9:30	M	M	M	CD	C	C	CD	D	D
10	M	M	M	CD	CD	D	D	D	P
10:30	M	M	M	CD	CD	D	D	D	P
				MONDAY					
8	V	D	C	C	A	C	D	D	D
8:30	V	D	C	C	A	**	D	D	D
9	S	S	S	C	C	C	M	M	M
9:30	S	S	S	C	C	C	M	M	M
10	S	S	S	D	D	D	M	M	M
10:30	S	S	S	D	D	D	M	M	M

A (adventure), C (comedy), CD (crime drama), CoD (comedy drama), D (drama), M (movie), MY (mystery), P (profile), S (sports), SF (science fiction), V (variety), W (western), * (World of Disney), ** (People)

Table 1 (continued)

	ABC			CBS			NBC		
				TUESDAY					
	76-77	77-78	78-79	76-77	77-78	78-79	76-77	77-78	78-79
8	C	C	C	V	C	D	D	C	C
8:30	C	C	C	V	C	D	D	C	C
9	D	C	C	C	C	M	CD	C	D
9:30	D	C	C	C	C	M	CD	C	D
10	D	D	CD	CD	D	M	CD	CD	D
10:30	D	D	CD	CD	D	M	CD	CD	D
				WEDNESDAY					
8	A	CoD	CoD	C	C	C	C	A	V
8:30	A	CoD	CoD	C	C	C	M	A	V
9	CD	CD	CD	C	M	M	M	W	M
9:30	CD	CD	CD	C	M	M	M	W	M
10	CD	CD	CD	CD	M	M	W	CD	M
10:30	CD	CD	CD	CD	M	M	W	CD	M
				THURSDAY					
8	C	C	C	D	D	D	A	CD	SF
8:30	C	C	C	D	D	D	A	CD	SF
9	C	C	C	CD	CD	CD	D	SF	CD
9:30	C	C	C	CD	CD	CD	D	SF	CD
10	CD	V	D	CD	CD	CD	V	D	D
10:30	CD	V	D	CD	CD	CD	V	D	D

A (adventure), C (comedy), CD (crime drama), CoD (comedy drama), D (drama), M (movie), MY (mystery), P (profile), S (sports), SF (science fiction), V (variety), W (western)

Table 1 (continued)

FRIDAY

	ABC			CBS			NBC		
	76-77	77-78	78-79	76-77	77-78	78-79	76-77	77-78	78-79
8	V	V	V	A	A	A	C	C	C
8:30	V	V	V	A	A	A	C	C	C
9	M	M	M	M	SF	A	CD	CD	CD
9:30	M	M	M	M	SF	A	CD	CD	CD
10	M	M	M	M	CD	CoD	CD	CD	MY
10:30	M	M	M	M	CD	CoD	CD	CD	MY

A (adventure), C (comedy), CD (crime drama), CoD (comedy drama), D (drama), M (movie), MY (mystery), P (profile), S (sports), SF (science fiction), V (variety), W (western)

Table 2

Time Devoted to Program-Type by Network, 1976-79

ABC

	76-77		77-78		78-79		Total	
	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%
Adventure	2.0	9.5	1.0	4.8	----	----	3.0	4.8
Comedy	4.0	19.0	6.0	28.6	7.0	33.3	17.0	27.0
Comedy Drama	----	----	1.0	4.8	1.0	4.8	2.0	3.2
Crime Drama	5.0	23.8	3.0	14.3	3.0	14.3	11.0	17.5
Drama	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	6.0	9.5
Movie	4.0	19.0	4.0	19.0	4.0	19.0	12.0	19.0
Mystery	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Profile	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Science Fiction	----	----	----	----	1.0	4.8	1.0	1.6
Sports	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	6.0	9.5
Variety	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	1.0	4.8	5.0	7.9
Western	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Miscellaneous	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Total*	21.0	99.8	21.0	100.0	21.0	100.0	63.0	100.0

*percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Table 2 (continued)

CBS

	76-77		77-78		78-79		Total	
	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%
Adventure	1.0	4.8	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	5.0	7.9
Comedy	7.0	33.3	8.0	38.1	4.5	21.4	19.5	31.0
Comedy Drama	----	----	----	----	1.0	4.8	1.0	1.6
Crime Drama	6.0	28.6	4.0	19.0	3.0	14.3	13.0	20.6
Drama	2.0	9.5	3.0	14.3	5.0	23.8	10.0	15.9
Movie	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	4.0	19.0	8.0	12.7
Mystery	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Profile	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Science Fiction	----	----	1.0	4.8	----	----	1.0	1.6
Sports	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Variety	3.0	14.3	1.0	4.8	1.0	4.8	5.0	7.9
Western	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Miscellaneous	----	----	----	----	.5	2.4	.5	.8
Total	21.0	100.0	21.0	100.0	21.0	100.0	63.0	100.0

Table 2 (continued)

NBC

	76-77		77-78		78-79		Total	
	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%
Adventure	2.0	9.5	2.0	9.5	1.0	4.8	5.0	7.9
Comedy	1.5	7.2	3.0	14.3	2.0	9.5	6.5	10.3
Comedy Drama	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Crime Drama	6.0	28.6	5.0	23.8	3.0	14.3	14.0	22.2
Drama	4.0	19.0	4.0	19.0	6.0	28.6	14.0	22.2
Movie	5.5	26.2	4.0	19.0	5.0	23.8	14.5	23.0
Mystery	----	----	----	----	1.0	4.8	1.0	1.6
Profile	----	----	----	----	1.0	4.8	1.0	1.6
Science Fiction	----	----	1.0	4.8	1.0	4.8	2.0	3.2
Sports	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Variety	1.0	4.8	----	----	1.0	4.8	2.0	3.2
Western	1.0	4.8	1.0	4.8	----	----	2.0	3.2
Miscellaneous	----	----	1.0	4.8	----	----	1.0	1.6
Total*	21.0	100.1	21.0	100.0	21.0	100.2	63.0	100.0

*percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Table 3

Cumulative Weekly Time Devoted to Program-Type, 1976-79

	76-77		77-78		78-79		Total	
	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%	hrs.	%
Adventure	5.0	7.9	5.0	7.9	3.0	4.8	13.0	6.9
Comedy	12.5	19.8	17.0	27.0	13.5	21.4	43.0	22.7
Comedy Drama	----	----	1.0	1.6	2.0	3.2	3.0	1.6
Crime Drama	17.0	27.0	12.0	19.0	9.0	14.3	38.0	20.1
Drama	8.0	12.7	9.0	14.3	13.0	20.6	30.0	15.9
Movie	11.5	18.2	10.0	15.9	13.0	20.6	34.5	18.2
Mystery	----	----	----	----	1.0	1.6	1.0	.5
Profile	----	----	----	----	1.0	1.6	1.0	.5
Science Fiction	----	----	2.0	3.2	2.0	3.2	4.0	2.1
Sports	2.0	3.2	2.0	3.2	2.0	3.2	6.0	3.2
Variety	6.0	9.5	3.0	4.8	3.0	4.8	12.0	6.3
Western	1.0	1.6	1.0	1.6	----	----	2.0	1.1
Miscellaneous	----	----	1.0	1.6	.5	.8	1.5	.8
Total*	63.0	99.9	63.0	100.1	63.0	100.1	189.0	99.9

*percentages may not total 100 due to rounding